

A BOOK REVIEW BY RICHARD C. BROWN

FOCUSING WITH CHILDREN: THE ART OF COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN AT SCHOOL AND AT HOME

BY MARTA STAPERT AND ERIK VERLIEFDE, ROSS-ON-WYE, UK.: PCCS BOOKS, 2008

Eugene Gendlin's proteges, Stapert and Verliefde, draw from over twenty years of experience applying this body-centered technique to communication with children.

Focusing, as described in the book, is a profound method of accessing the body's wisdom and has been used successfully to enrich non-conceptual understanding and to resolve everyday obstacles. The book generously offers a wide range of situations, from a teacher who is "feeling strange and grumpy all day," to a child who has problems with math, as well as children with more troubling difficulties.

The authors dive right in by explaining Focusing in practical contexts. Readers may find the terminology in this English translation sometimes quaint, but it is easily understandable. Effective and immediately applicable examples give the reader a tangible sense of how to help children investigate inner experience. Reflections highlight and reinforce specific techniques. Indeed the book is well-organized with chapters for teachers, parents, those working with individual children, and group leaders. There is also a chapter for those who would like to try Focusing for themselves, highly recommended. But *Focusing with Children* is not just for beginners. Parts of this richly resourced book are devoted to specific refinements that offer helpful ideas for anyone who works thoughtfully with children.

In addition to being practical and accessible, *Focusing with Children* introduces an extremely subtle therapeutic art. Woven throughout are important insights for parents and teachers about the very nature of meaningful teaching and parenting relationships. At the heart of Focusing practice is the ability to stay present with inner bodily sensations, even when they are uncomfortable or seemingly unknowable. In one example, the mother of a gloomy, dejected child invites her to turn her attention inside, where the child discovers a sensation that is "as hard as a very heavy boulder." The mother asks, "Can you stay with that, with friendly attention and just receive it?" Again and again the approach conveys to the child a deep confidence and wholesome attitude toward inner experience. The authors emphasize, "The child's problem may not disappear, but he will see that it needn't get in the way of everything he tries to do."

As a deeply contemplative method of communication, Focusing negotiates the fine line between inactive attention and the creative action intended to dissolve the trouble. First there is the simple attention to the "felt sense," an inner sensation that is "not purely physical" and that often carries emotional meaning. Then comes the method of expression: "Your body will know where it wants to go." No analysis is involved. When the felt sense is expressed, there is often a "shift" or change, which is usually calming and restorative.

Considering that this is a body-based practice, more examples of gesture, movement, vocalization, and sound would be welcome additions for this reviewer. These vehicles might be particularly effective for children who are uncomfortable with artistic expression or verbal. After all, articulating non-conceptually through voice, sound, and gesture reflects the deeply holistic nature of the Focusing method. This enormously inspiring book should take its place as a landmark in contemplative practice with children.



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